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Arkansas Participates in USDA-led Agribusiness Trade Mission to Sub-Saharan Africa

Little Rock, Ark. – Arkansas officials recently returned from an agricultural trade mission to Sub-Saharan Africa led by United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Deputy Secretary Krysta Harden. The agricultural trade mission took place in Ghana, Africa from November 15-20.

Secretary of Agriculture Wes Ward, Secretary of State Mark Martin, Deputy Secretary of State Joseph Wood and World Trade Center Arkansas Representative Denise Thomas were among attendees. Representatives from Tyson Foods, the USA Rice Federation, the American Soybean Association and others also participated in the trade mission. In all, five state departments of agriculture and 26 agribusinesses and organizations throughout the United States accompanied Deputy Secretary Harden on the trade mission.

Agriculture Secretary Wes Ward explained, "Arkansas exports approximately 30% of our state's agricultural products each year and is consistently ranked in the top ten in the nation for exports of several commodities. Relationships and face-to-face visits are an important aspect of agricultural trade. USDA-led agricultural trade missions assist the Arkansas Agriculture Department in building relationships with our global partners and expanding opportunities for Arkansas farmers and ranchers."

Sub-Saharan Africa has a strong economic outlook, a growing middle class, and surging demand for consumer oriented foods. The region is also one of the fastest growing areas for U.S. agricultural exports, which have grown by more than 50 % over the last decade to a total of \$2.3 billion in 2014.

The outlook is positive for expanded export opportunities in Ghana and the Sub-Saharan Africa region. In 2014, the USDA reports that Sub-Saharan Africa imported an estimated \$48.5 billion in food and agricultural products. Currently, Arkansas plays a role in Sub-Saharan Africa with exports of the following products: poultry and meat products, wheat, rice, dairy and forest products, and distilled spirits. As of 2014, the top Sub-Saharan Africa markets for U.S. agricultural and related products include: Nigeria, Angola, South Africa, Ghana, Ethiopia, and Kenya.

"The potential for development in Sub-Saharan Africa is huge. Arkansas agribusiness has a lot to offer and establishing a relationship with this region will be mutually beneficial to our economy and theirs. Good friends make good trading partners," said Secretary of State Mark Martin.

"The continent of Africa represents a great opportunity for Arkansas food producers to establish strategic business alliances for bilateral trade and exchange. Trade missions of this nature help facilitate opportunities for economic growth within the state. We look forward to participating and coordinating more opportunities for Arkansas companies to be represented in Africa and foster long term business alliances for trade," said Denise Thomas of World Trade Center Arkansas.

Participation in this trade mission not only shows a commitment to assist Sub-Saharan African countries, but also demonstrates a commitment to work closely with USDA and other state departments of agriculture to expand export opportunities for agricultural products.

The Arkansas Agriculture Department is dedicated to the development and implementation of policies and programs for Arkansas agriculture and forestry to keep its farmers and ranchers competitive in national and international markets while ensuring safe food, fiber, and forest products for the citizens of the state and nation. Learn more by visiting aad.arkansas.gov and arkansasgrown.org.

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